

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
BARRE CITY PLACE
219 NORTH MAIN STREET
CONFERENCE ROOM 1
BARRE, VERMONT
June 24, 2021**

***Hybrid meeting held in-person and by teleconference**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Fowler Charlie Moore
Chris Andreasson Charles Hunter
Rick Moulton Charlie Baker

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Flynn, Secretary of Transportation
Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Dan Delabruere, VTrans
Trini Brassard, VTrans
Bob Atchinson, VTrans
Costa Pappis, VTrans
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
Dave Pelletier, VTrans
Toni Clithero, VTrans
Karen Songhurst, VTrans
Kyle Wells, VTrans
Erin Charbonneau, VTrans
Jason Owen, VTrans
Shaun Corbett, VTrans
Scott Burbank, VHB
Kevin Chittenden, Amtrak
Christopher Natale, Amtrak
Selden Houghton, VRS
Mary Anne Michaels, VRS
Christopher Parker, VRAN
Ben Heckscher
Richard "Hank" Lee
Bruce King
Colin Bratton, WRC
Gary Fox, Rockingham/Bellows Falls
Peter Young
Ryan McLaren
Erica Campbell, Sen. Sanders' Office
Chris Saunders, Sen. Leahy's Office
William S. Rech
Charles Poltenson
Alan Legacy
Jane Brophy

Devon Neary
Dan Peacock
Brian Savage, legislature

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Dan Delabruere called the teleconference meeting to order at 1:07 PM and explained the procedure to be followed.

Secretary Flynn mentioned the following:

- The recent passing of Lisa Wulfson and the long family history in the railroad industry.
- Restart of Amtrak in three weeks.

2.0 Approval of Minutes

March 23, 2021

MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to approve the minutes of 3/23/21 as presented. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

3.0 Passenger Topics

Ethan Allen Train to Burlington Update

Dan Delabruere reported on the following remaining projects to be done to bring Amtrak to Burlington:

- Reconfiguration of the rail yard in Burlington to allow for an additional siding for the Amtrak train
- Switches (supply chain may be a problem)
- Middlebury platform (work being done now)
- Pittsford siding (to be done in the fall)

The FRA is on board with the main line track exemption with conditions such as the Amtrak schedule not conflicting with the freight schedule. The Ethan Allen Express schedule will be the same: Southbound leave Burlington 10:15 AM, leave Rutland 12:25 PM, arrive NYC 5:50 PM. Northbound leave NYC 2:21 PM, leave Rutland 7:46 PM, arrive Burlington 9:55 PM.

Carl Fowler commented there is opportunity to extend passenger service north to Montreal either on the Vermont side or New York side.

Amtrak Return to Service

Toni Clithero announced the Amtrak return to service event is July 19, 2021. The marketing campaign begins July 1, 2021. Travel tickets will be available for \$1. Kick off is in St. Albans. There will be shuttle bus service to return to Montpelier and Brattleboro. Stations along the line will hold their own events (speeches, refreshments, music, train ride). Free maple creemees will be offered in Montpelier.

Vermont Statewide Rail Plan

Dan Delabruere reported the statewide rail plan is now complete. Thanks and appreciation are extended to the Rail Council and the VTrans team for the hard work on the plan which will be used for guidance with funding opportunities and rail projects.

Carl Fowler mentioned the extremely poor condition of the Essex Junction rail station and a possible \$3 million earmark for the station with help from Sen. Leahy's Office. Charles Hunter said there will be lots of work done in Essex. NECR is responsible for the building, but something needs to be done for the comfort of the passengers. Dan Delabruere said VTrans supports all the projects to be done at the Essex Junction station and is helping coordinate the effort.

Carl Fowler mentioned the issue of people booking CT rail fare on the Vermonter and blocking out seats that Vermont passengers may want. Dan Delabruere said he will talk to Amtrak about the matter.

4.0 Freight and Construction Topics

Bridge Management Report

Erin Charbonneau gave an update on the Bridge Management Program. The asset team is doing the bridge inspections again this year. The state is responsible for 170 of the 214 bridges in Vermont and of the 170 bridges only 18 are at less than 286,000 capacity. Some of the bridges have 286,000 capacity, but the condition of the structure will not allow this weight. Bridge capacity at 286,000 pounds is at 10 mph travel speed.

Chris Andreasson asked about the impact on the railroad of 10 mph speed on bridges with 286,000 capacity. Seldon Houghton said operational efficiency is impacted. Dan Delabruere noted the ultimate goal for the state is 286,000 capacity at 40 mph (10 mph is the minimum).

Rail Project Updates

Kyle Well gave an update on the Ethan Allen Express western corridor work (the work is mainly in Burlington and includes crossings, side track, platforms, switches, sidings) and statewide projects that include safety improvements, rehab to 286,000 capacity on bridges in Arlington, Bradford, Coventry Newbury, St. Johnsbury, culvert work in Fairlee, runaround track/culverts on the Montpelier WACR, and relay rail Barre Street crossing and US 2 crossing. Dan Delabruere pointed out the projects that were reviewed are only a small portion of the work being done by the rail team.

WACR M&B Track

An aerial video of the Barre-Montpelier new main line and bike path was shown. The old main line will be a holding area for empty rail cars.

5.0 Operation Lifesaver Update

Toni Clithero reported with no trains on the rail for the past 17 months there is concern with people and cars at crossings when Amtrak high speed passenger service returns. Operation Lifesaver is working hard to get the message out that the fast passenger train is coming back and to think train when there is a railroad track. Weekly ads will be posted

on Front Porch Forum to get the message out that high speed passenger train service will return July 19, 2021. There is also concern about the level of trespass, especially in South Royalton, Waterbury, Middlesex, and Essex. Operation Lifesaver will have a mobile message board to raise awareness of the danger of railroad tracks.

6.0 Public Comment

Charlie Moore said, “God bless Vermont”.

Ben Heckscher requested the meeting agenda be posted in advance of the meeting per the Open Meeting Law.

7.0 Next Meeting

September 23, 2021 – hybrid meeting (remote and in-person).

8.0 Adjournment

MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by Chris Andreasson, to adjourn the meeting. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:35 PM.

Rscdy by tape: MERiordan